

# Editorial: Journey into Cyberspace and Back to the Classroom Again

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*The design of cyberspace is another life-world, a parallel universe, offering the intoxicating prospect of actually fulfilling... the dream of transcending the physical world, fully alive, at will, to dwell in some Beyond--to be empowered or enlightened there, alone or with others, and to return.*

Michael Benedikt  
Cyberspace: First Steps, 1992

Cyberspace and the exciting possibilities of computer mediated communications are enthusiastically described in Tillyer's feature article, "*Modem*" *Times* . As she notes, electronic communications provide not only an entree to libraries, research institutions, art galleries, and numerous other data bases; they provide instant access to a universal community of friends. The web of media connections that Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980) wrote about more than 30 years ago is breaking the barriers of distance and time, creating a "global village." Geographically isolated communities now have the possibility to thoughtfully focus upon electronic texts and collaborate with others in distinctly different cultural environments.

But if cyberspace technology is to provide meaningful learning experiences, educators must have a role in its application. As Taylor notes in his discussion of the hypermedia language laboratory at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman, foreign language teachers must go beyond the information storage and retrieval capability of computers and move toward establishing a truly interactive relationship among learners and electronic texts. Worth pondering is his question: "Before there were computers and language labs, did people learn language by reading encyclopedias and dictionaries?" How much of the information available on a typical CD-Rom can be processed by the novice learner of the foreign language? How much of this intake can be processed for output?

Another dimension of CALL is examined in Reis's article on using a single computer in the classroom as a resource for enhancing traditional EFL activities. By giving the computer important, specific roles in the classroom, Reis has enhanced his own role as a facilitator in the language learning process.

From virtual reality, we return to the real life of the foreign language classroom and the teacher's continuing objective to provide authentic language experiences for the students. The need to customize our classes is the focus of articles by Johns, Lescano, Syrquin, and Rendon. Of particular interest is how Johns links ESP with literacy portfolios. She sees portfolios as more than mere collections of students' work; they should display a variety of work that demonstrates the student's literacy growth and contains his/her reflections about how specific texts and tasks were handled. By this means, students can develop their metacognitive awareness and become better monitors of their own performance. Lescano looks at the needs of the learning disabled (LDs), a group never before treated in the *Forum* , discussing an innovative program at a school in Peru.

The relevance of Discourse Analysis in developing language material is emphasized in Nwogu's analysis of scientific texts. By helping students of science differentiate between derived and new information in the target language, he empowers them to conceptualize how scientific information is structured.

It is for our readers to determine what role cyberspace is to play in supplementing the goals they have set for their students; but in doing so, it may be useful to keep in mind the thoughts of Clifford Stoll, one pioneer on the information superhighway:

*"What are the best ways for us to connect with one another? Such connections are rare enough in person; the computer adds a layer of interference that we can do without. Don't give yourself over completely to the virtual world. Get a life."*

Clifford Stoll

Silicon Snake Oil: Second Thoughts on the Information Highway, 1995